



Memories of Yesterday



Mrs. Mary A. Livemore, who spoke in 1895 at the 50th anniversary of Partridge Academy, taught a private school there before the academy was established. Talking about her school which flourished in the 1840's, she says:

"In those days teachers were obliged to fall back on their own resources. There were no normal schools to train them for their work, no teachers' institutions, no educational journals, no graded schools; the text books were poorly adapted to their uses, and but little was done with the blackboard. If a teacher had a natural attitude for teaching, and then had trained himself, he would in some way succeed in doing good work. He would so thoroughly master the subjects he was to teach as to supersede the text book and dispense with it, would be ingenious in devising ways of quickening his pupils and holding their attention—would keep in constant touch with them, and put much of himself into them, and in this way many a teacher of the olden time did better for his pupils than he ever knew."

She says that around 1845 Duxbury was an interesting town—"a famous ship-building town, although the people declared it was on the decline, and shook their heads sorrowfully, saying: "Duxbury is not what it used to be." There were, however, six ships on the stocks in the various shipyards the first year I went into the town, and others were projected for the near future."

She added that the launching of a ship broke up her school. "A favored few of my pupils would be sure to be invited on board during a launching, while others would be asked to take seats in front of the shipyard, where they could observe the passage of the vessel into the water, and the remainder would ask to be excused from school till the great event was over." She says she didn't mind giving a half holiday, "never sorry to witness the launching myself."

How Ships Were Launched

"The blocks were knocked away rapidly one after another, and every obstacle in the way of the ship was removed. She was gently urged and persuaded by the hands of the builders to begin her passage from the land to the sea. With seeming limidity she glided slowly down the ways, grew more courageous and proceeded faster, and then with one swift plunge and a shudder from stem to stern entered her native element, amid the shouts of the onlookers and the congratulations of all who were interested."

"There were 43 shipmasters resident in the town, a large number of whom were Atlantic ship captains, and most of them picked up their crews in town. As none

of them remained a long time at home, Duxbury was emphatically a town of women and children, and the women were the most capable and intelligent at that time that I had ever met. Thrown on their own resources, almost entirely they had become equal to every emergency, and were as handsome and well formed as they were executive."

Pilgrim Names

"The names of the Duxbury people were very suggestive—Bradford, Alden, Brewster, Soule, Webster, Sprague, Winsor, Drew, Sampson—almost all my pupils and acquaintances in town bore some one of these honored names. Of the 20 subscribers to the civil compact, signed in the cabin of the Mayflower, November, 1620, who survived the first fatal winter, seven of them became inhabitants of Duxbury, and three of them, Elder Brewster, Miles Standish and John Alden, made the town famous."

"Never was there a pleasanter community in which to make one's home than Duxbury, when I first knew it. The disintegration of the town had not then fairly set in, and it would be difficult to find a more hospitable, intelligent, social and cultivated people in any New England town today."

"College presidents and professors, clergymen, librarians, business men of prominence, artists, musicians, teachers, reformers and leaders of society have been sent out into the world since then by the town of Duxbury, and it has not surprised me to see them taking the positions to which they were ordained from birth. For I felt the brainy qualities of the people before I had been a resident of Duxbury a month."

After extolling the women as superior housekeepers and cooks. Mrs. Livemore said the men "had at their tongue's end any information you might desire, concerning the ocean and its idiosyncracies, ships and all nautical matters, foreign countries and human nature in general. The majority of the people lived in the part of the town called "The Village," where the houses ranged themselves along the bay as if they and their occupants feared to lose sight of the salt water."

(If you live in one of these old houses, it is quite possible that a ship captain or mate lived in it a century ago. According to Dr. W.K.S. Thomas of Washington St., his great-grand aunt and her husband, Captain Lewis Winsor, lived in our house.—Ed.)